

Beneath the huge central arch in Cooper Square a meeting was in progress—a gathering of the gray-clad workers of the lower levels of New York. Less than two hundred of their number were in evidence, and these huddled in dejected groups around the pedestal from which a fiery-tongued orator was addressing them. Lounging negligently at the edge of the small crowd were a dozen of the red police.

“I tell you, comrades,” the speaker was shouting, “the time has come when we must revolt. We must battle to the death with the wearers of the purple. Why work out our lives down here so they can live in the lap of luxury over our heads? Why labor day after day at the oxygen generators to give them the fresh air they breathe?”

The speaker paused uncertainly as a chorus of raucous laughter came to his ears. He glared belligerently at a group of newcomers who stood aloof from his own gathering. Seven or eight of them there were, and they wore the gray with obvious discomfort. Slummers! Well, they’d hear something

they could carry back with them when they returned to their homes!

“Why,” he continued in rising tones, “do we sit at the controls of the pneumatic tubes which carry thousands of our fellows to tasks equally irksome, while they of the purple ride their air yachts to the pleasure cities of the sky lanes? Never in the history of mankind have the poor been poorer and the rich richer!”

“Yah!” shouted a disrespectful voice from among the newcomers. “You’re full o’ bunk! Nothing but bunk!”

An ominous murmur swelled from the crowd and the red police roused from their lethargy. The mounting scream of a siren echoed in the vaulted recesses above and re-echoed from the surrounding columns—the call for reserves.

All was confusion in the Square. The little group of newcomers immediately became the center of a mêlée of dangerous proportions. Some of the more timid of the wearers of the gray struggled to get out of the

crowd and away. Others, not in sympathy with the speaker, rushed to the support of the besieged visitors. The police were, for the moment, overwhelmed.

The orator, mad with resentment and injured pride, hurled himself into the group. A knife flashed in his hand; rose and fell. A scream of agony shrilled piercingly above the din of the fighting.

Then came the reserves, and the wielder of the knife turned to escape. He broke away from the milling combatants and made speedily for the shadows that lay beyond the great pillars of the Square. But he never reached them, for one of the red guards raised his riot pistol and fired. There was a dull *plop*, and a rubbery something struck the fleeing man and wrapped powerful tentacles around his body, binding him hand and foot in their swift embrace. He fell crashing to the pavement.

A lieutenant of the red police was shouting his orders and the din in the Square was deafening. With their numbers greatly augmented, the guards were now in

control of the situation and their maces struck left and right. Groans and curses came from the gray-clad workers, who now fought desperately to escape.

Then, with startling suddenness, the artificial sunlight of the cavernous Square was gone, leaving the battle to continue in utter darkness.

Cooper Square, in the year 2108, was the one gathering place in New York City where the wearers of the gray denim were permitted to assemble and discuss their grievances publicly. Deep in the maze of lower-level ways seldom visited by wearers of the purple, the grottolike enclosure bore the name of a philanthropist of the late nineteenth century and still carried a musty air of certain of the traditions of that period.

In Astor Way, on the lowest level of all, there was a tiny book shop. Nestled between two of the great columns that provided foundation support for the eighty levels above, it was safely hidden from the gaze of curious passersby in the Square. Slumming parties from afar, their purple temporarily discarded

for the gray, occasionally passed within a stone's throw of the little shop, never suspecting the existence of such a retreat amidst the dark shadows of the pillars. But to the initiated few amongst the wearers of the gray, and to certain of the red police, it was well known.

Rudolph Krassin, proprietor of the establishment, was a bent and withered ancient. His jacket of gray denim hung loosely from his spare frame and his hollow cough bespoke a deep-seated ailment. Looking out from behind thick lenses set in his square-rimmed spectacles, the watery eyes seemed vacant; uncomprehending. But old Rudolph was a scholar—keen-witted—and a gentleman besides. To his many friends of the gray-clad multitude he was an anomaly; they could not understand his devotion to his well-thumbed volumes. But they listened to his words of wisdom and, more frequently than they could afford, parted with precious labor tickets in exchange for reading matter that was usually of the lighter variety.

When the fighting started in the Square, Rudolph was watching and listening from a point of vantage in the

shadows near his shop. This fellow Leontardo, who was the speaker, was an agitator of the worst sort. His arguments always were calculated to arouse the passions of his hearers; to inflame them against the wearers of the purple. He had nothing constructive to offer. Always he spoke of destruction; war; bloodshed. Rudolph marveled at the patience of the red police. To-day, these newcomers, obviously a slumming party of youngsters bent on whatever mischief they could find, were interfering with the speaker. The old man chuckled at the first interruption. But at signs of real trouble he scurried into the shadows and vanished in the blackness of first-level passages known only to himself. He knew where to find the automatic sub-station of the Power Syndicate.

Returning to the darkness he had created in the Square, he was relieved to find that the sounds of the fighting had subsided. Apparently most of the wearers of the gray had escaped. He skirted the avenue of pillars along Astor Way, feeling his way from one to another as he progressed toward his little shop. Peering into the blackness of the square he saw the

feeble beams of several flash-lamps in the hands of the police. They were searching for survivors of the fracas, maces and riot pistols held ready for use. A sobbing gasp from close by set his pulses throbbing. He crept stealthily in the direction from which the sound had come.

“Steady now,” came a whispered voice. “My uncle’s shop is close by. He’ll take you in. Here—let me lift you.”

There was a shuffling on the opposite side of the pillar at which Rudolph had halted; another grunt of pain.

“Karl!” hissed the old man. It was his nephew.

“Uncle Rudolph?” came the guarded response.

“Yes. Can I help you?”

“Quick—yes—he’s fainted.”

The old man was around the huge base of the column in an instant. He groped in the darkness and his hands encountered human bodies.

“Who is it?” he breathed.

“One of the hecklers, Uncle. A young lad; and of the purple I think. He’s been knifed.”

Together they dragged the inert form into the shelter of the long line of pillars. There was a trampling of many men in the square. That would be a second detachment of reserves. A ray of light filtered through and dancing shadows of the giant columns made grotesque outlines against the walls of the Way. A portable searchlight had been brought to the scene. They must hurry.

Impeded by the dead weight of their burden, they made sorry progress and several times found it necessary to halt in the shadow of a pillar while the red police passed by in their search of the Square. It was with a sigh of relief that Rudolph opened the door of his shop and with still greater satisfaction closed

and bolted it securely. His nephew shouldered the limp form of the unconscious youth and carried it to his own bed in one of the rear rooms.

“Ugh!” exclaimed old Rudolph as he ripped open the young man’s shirt, “it’s a nasty cut. Warm water, Karl.”

The gaping wound was washed and bound tightly. Rudolph’s experienced fingers told him the knife had not reached a vital spot. The youth would recover.

“But Karl,” he objected, “he wears the purple. Under the gray. See! It’ll get us in trouble if we keep him.”

He was stripping the young man of his clothing to prepare him for bed. Suddenly there was revealed on the white skin a triangular mark. Bright scarlet it was and just over the right hip. He made a hasty attempt to hide it from the watching eyes of Karl.

“Uncle!” snapped his nephew, “—the mark you call cursed! He has it, too!”

The tall young man in gray was on his knees, tearing the hands of the old man away. He saw the mark clearly now. There was no further use of attempting to conceal it. Rudolph rose and faced his angered nephew, his watery eyes inscrutable.

“You told me, Rudolph, that it was a brand that cursed me. I have seen it on him, too. You have lied to me.”

The old man’s eyes wavered. He trembled violently.

“Why did you lie?” demanded Karl. “Am I not your nephew? Am I not really cursed as you’ve maintained? Tell me—tell me!”

He had the old man by the shoulders, shaking him cruelly.

“Karl—Karl,” begged the helpless ancient, “it was for your good. I swear it. You were born to the purple. That’s what that mark means—not that you’re degraded to the gray, as I said. But there’s a reason. Let me explain.”

“Bah! A reason! You’ve kept me in this misery and squalor for a reason! Who’s my father?”

He flung Rudolph to the floor, where the old man crouched in apprehensive misery.

“Please Karl—don’t! I can explain. Just give me time. It’s a long story.”

“Time! Time! For twenty-odd years you’ve lied to me; cheated me. My birthright—where is it?”

He menaced his supposed uncle; was about to strike him. Then suddenly he was ashamed. He turned on his heel.

“I’m leaving,” he said shortly.

“Karl—my boy,” begged Rudolph Krassin, struggling to his feet. “You can’t! That lad in there—he—”

But Karl was too angry to reason.

“To hell with him!” he raged, “and to hell with you! I’m through!”

He stamped from the room and out into the eery shadows of the Way. Karl was done with his old life. He’d go to the upper levels and claim his rights. Some day, too, he’d punish the man who’d stolen them away. God! Born to the purple! To think he’d missed it all! Probably was kidnaped by the old rascal he’d been calling uncle. But he’d find out. Rudolph didn’t have to explain. Fingerprint records would clear his name; establish his rightful station in life. He dived into a passage that would lead him to one of the express lifts. He’d soon be overhead.

A sergeant of the red police looked up startled from his desk as a tall youth in the gray denim of forty levels below appeared before him.

“Well?” he growled. The stalwart young worker had stared belligerently and insolently, he thought.

“I want to check my fingerprint record, Sergeant.”

“Hm. Pretty cocky, aren’t you? The records for such as you are down below, where you belong.”

“Not mine, I think.”

“So? And who the devil are you?”

“That’s what I’m here to find out. I’ve got a triangle branded on my right hip.”

“A what?”

“Triangle. Here—look!”

The amazing youngster had raised his jacket and was pulling at his shirt. The sergeant stared at what was revealed, his eyes bulging as he looked.

“Lord!” he gasped, “a Van Dorn—in the gray!”

Quickly he turned to the radiovision and made rapid connection with several persons in turn—important ones, by the appearance of the features of each in the brilliant disc of the instrument.

Karl was confused by the sudden turn of things. The sergeant talked so rapidly he could not catch the sense of his words. And that name, Van Dorn, eluded him. He knew he had heard it before, in the little shop down there in Astor Way. But he could not place it. He wished fervently that he had paid more attention to the desires of old Rudolph; had studied more and read the books the old man had begged him to read. His new surroundings confused him, too, and he knew that he was the center of some great new excitement.

Then they were in the room; two individuals, one in the red uniform of a captain of police, the other a pompous, whiskered man in purple. Others followed and it seemed to Karl that the room was filled with them, strangers all, and they stared at him and chattered incessantly. He experienced an overwhelming impulse to run, but mastered it and faced them boldly.

A square of plate glass was placed under his outstretched fingers. It was smeared with something sticky and he watched the whiskered man as he held it up to the light and studied the impressions. Then

there was more confusion. Everyone talked at once and the pompous one in purple made use of the radiovision, holding the square of glass near its disc for observation by the person he had called. The identification number was repeated aloud, a string of figures and letters that were a meaningless jumble to Karl. The room became quiet while the police captain thumbed the pages of a huge book he had taken from among many similar ones that filled a rack behind the desk.

Karl's blood froze in his veins at the rumbling swish of a car speeding through the pneumatic tube beneath their feet. His nerves were on edge. Then the captain of police looked up from the book and there was a peculiar glint in his eyes as he spoke.

"Peter Van Dorn. Missing since 2085. Wanted by Continental Government. Ha!"

The words came to Karl's ears through a growing sensation of unreality. It seemed that the speaker was miles away and that his voice and features were those of a radiovision likeness. Wanted by the great power

across the Atlantic! It was unthinkable. Why, he had been but an infant in 2085! What possible crime could he have committed? But the red police captain was speaking again, this time in a chill voice. And the room of the police, thick with the smoke of a dozen cigars, became suddenly stifling.

“Where have you been these twenty-three years, Peter Van Dorn?” asked the captain. “Who have you lived with, I mean?”

Something warned him to protect old Rudolph. And somehow he wished he had not treated the old fellow as he did when he left. His self-possession returned. A wave of hot resentment swept over him.

“That’s my affair,” he said defiantly.

The captain shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, well,” he said, “you needn’t answer—now. We’ll find out when it’s necessary. In the meanwhile we’ll have to turn you over to the Continental Ambassador.”

Two of the red police advanced toward him and the rest drew back.

“You mean I’m under arrest?” asked Karl incredulously.

“Certainly. Of course you’re not to be harmed.”

One of the guards had him by the arm and he saw the glint of handcuffs. They couldn’t do this! If it had been for rioting in the Square it would be different. But this! It meant he was a prisoner of a foreign government, for what reason he could not guess. He lost his head completely.

The captain cried out in amazement as one of his huskiest guards went sprawling under a well-planted punch. This youngster must be as crazy as was his father before him. But he was a whirlwind. Before he could be stopped he had tackled the other guard and with a mighty heave flung him halfway across the room where he fell with a thud that left him dazed and gasping. The pompous little man in the purple

crawled under the desk as the sergeant leveled a slender tube at the young giant in gray.

Karl ducked instinctively at sight of the weapon, but the spiteful crackle of its mechanism was too quick for him. A faintly luminous ray struck him full in the breast and stopped him in his tracks. A thrill of intense cold chased up his spine and a thunderbolt crashed in his brain. The captain caught his stiffened body as he fell.

Karl—refusing to think of himself as Peter Van Dorn—came to his senses as from a troubled sleep. His head ached miserably and he turned it slowly to view his surroundings. Then, in a flash, he remembered. The paralyzing ray of the red police! They never used it in the lower levels; but overhead—why, the swine! He sat suddenly erect and glared into a pair of green eyes that regarded him curiously.

A quick glance showed him that he was in a small padded compartment like that of the pneumatic tube cars. At one end there was an amazing array of machinery with glittering levers and handwheels—a

control board on which numberless tiny lights blinked and flickered in rapid succession. At these controls squatted the twisted figure of a dwarf. A second of the creatures sat at his side and stared with those horrible green eyes.

“Lord!” he muttered. “Am I still asleep?”

“No,” smiled the dwarf, “you’re awake, Peter Van Dorn.” The misshapen creature did not seem unfriendly.

“Then where am I, and who are you?”

“You’re in one of the Zar’s rocket cars, speeding toward Dorn. We are but two of the Zar’s servants—Moon men.”

“Rocket car? Moon men?” Karl was aghast. He wanted to pinch himself. But a hollow roar to the rear told him he was in a rapidly moving vessel of some sort. Certainly, too, these dwarfs were not figments of his imagination.

“You’ve been kept completely ignorant?” asked the dwarf.

“It—it seems so.” Karl was bewildered. “You mean we are out in the open—traveling in space—to the Moon perhaps?”

The dwarf laughed. “No, I wish we were,” he replied. “But we are about halfway to the capital of the Continental Empire, greatest of world powers. We’ll be there in an hour.”

“But I don’t understand.”

“Stupid. Didn’t you ever hear of the rocket ships that cross the ocean like a projectile, mounting a thousand miles from the surface and making the trip in two hours?”

“No!” Karl was aghast. “Are we really in such a contraption?” he faltered.

“Say! Are you kidding me?” The dwarf was incredulous. “Do you mean to tell me you know so

little of your world as that? Have you never read anything? The news broadcasts, the thought exchangers—don't you follow them at all?"

Karl shook his head in growing wonder. Truly Rudolph had kept him in ignorance. Or was it his own fault? He had refused to dig into the volumes old Krassin had begged him to read. The broadcasts and the thought machines—well, only those of the purple had access to those.

"Hey, Laro!" called the dwarf to his companion, "this mole is as dumb as can be. Doesn't know he's alive hardly. And a Van Dorn!"

The two laughed uproariously and Karl raged inwardly. Mole! So that's what they called wearers of the gray! He clenched his fists and rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Sorry," apologized his tormentor. "Mustn't get sore now. It seems so funny to us though. And listen, kid, you'll never have another chance to hear it all. So, if

you'll sit down and calm yourself a bit I'll give you an earful."

Mollified, Karl listened. A marvelous tale it was, of a disgruntled scientist of the Eastern Hemisphere who had conquered that portion of the world with the aid of the inhabitants he had found on the outer side of the Moon; of the scientist who still ruled the East—Zar of the Continental Empire. A horrible war—in 2085, the year of his own birth—depopulated the countries of Asia, Europe and Africa and reduced them to subjection. There was no combatting the destructive rays and chemical warfare of the Moon men. The United Americas, still weakened from a civil war of their own, remained aloof and, for some strange reason, the Zar left them in peace, contenting himself with his conquest of practically all of the rest of the world. Now, it seemed, the two major powers were as separate as if on different planets, there being no traffic between them save by governmental sanction; and that was rarely given.

It grew uncomfortably warm in the compartment as the rocket car entered the lower atmosphere but Karl

listened spellbound to the astounding revelations of the Moon man. There came a pause in the discourse of the dwarf as a number of relays clicked furiously on the control board and the vessel slackened its speed perceptibly.

“But,” said Karl, thinking aloud rather than meaning to interrupt, “what has all this to do with me? Why does the government of this Zar want me?”

The dwarf bent close and eyed him cautiously. “Poor kid!” he whispered, “it doesn’t seem right that you should suffer for something that happened when you were born; something you know nothing about. But the Zar knows best. You—”

There came a stabbing pencil of light from over Karl’s shoulder and the green eyes of the dwarf went wide with horrified surprise. He clutched at his breast where the flame had contacted, then slowly collapsed in a pitiful, distorted heap. Karl recoiled from the odor of putrefaction that immediately filled the compartment. He whirled to face the new danger but saw nothing but the padded walls.

Then they were in darkness save for the blinking lights of the control board. He was thrown forward violently and the piercing screech of compressed air rushing past the vessel told him they had entered the receiving tube at their destination and were being retarded in speed for the landing. This much he had gathered from the explanations of the now silenced dwarf.

Laro, the other Moon man, remained mute at the controls. His companion evidently had talked too much.

The vessel had stopped and a section of the padded rear wall of the compartment moved back to reveal a second chamber. There were three other occupants of the ship and Karl knew now at whose hands the talkative Moon man had met his death. One of the three—all wearers of the purple—still held the generator of the dazzling ray in his hands. He decided wisely that resistance was useless and followed meekly when he was led from the ship.

Endlessly they rode upward in a high-speed lift, dismounting finally at a pneumatic tube entrance. A special car whisked them roaring into the blackness. Then they were shot forth into the open and Karl saw the light of the sun for the first time in many years. They were on the upper surface of a great city, Dorn, the capital of the Continental Empire.

The air was filled with darting ships of all sorts and sizes, most of them being pleasure craft of the wearers of the purple. To Karl it was the sudden realization of his dreams. He was one of them. He, too, should be wearing the purple. Then his heart sank as one of his guards prodded him into action. His dream already was shattered for they stood at the entrance to a great crystal pyramid that rose from the flat expanse of the roofs of Dorn. It was the palace of the Zar.

It seemed then that fairyland had opened its gates to the young man in gray denim. He immediately fell under its influence when they traversed a long lane between rows of brightly colored growing things which filled the air with sweet odors. Feathered

creatures fluttered about and twittered and caroled in the sheer joy of being alive. It was sweeter music than he had ever believed possible or even imagined as existing. Again he forgot the menace of the imperial edict which had brought him from the other side of the world.

Then rudely, he was brought back to earth. He was in the presence of the mighty Zar and his three escorts were bowing themselves from the huge room in which the wizened monarch sat enthroned. They had finished their duties.

A shriveled face; beady eyes; trembling hands with abnormally large knuckles; a cruel and determined mouth—these were the features that most impressed Karl as he stared wordlessly at this Zar of the Eastern Hemisphere. The magnificence of the royal robe was lost on the young wearer of the gray.

“Well, well, so this is Peter Van Dorn, my beloved nephew.” The Zar was speaking and the chilly sarcasm in which the words were uttered belied the friendliness they otherwise might have implied.

“That’s what I’m told,” replied Karl, “though I didn’t know I’m supposed to be the nephew of so great a figure as yourself.”

Not bad that, for an humble wearer of the gray.

“Oh, yes, yes, indeed. Why else should I have sent for you?”

“I have wondered why—and still wonder.”

“Oh, you wonder, eh?” The Zar inspected him carefully and then broke into a cackle of horrible laughter. “A Van Dorn in gray denim!” he chortled. “A mole of the Americas! And to think that even the Zar has been unable to find him in all these years!”

“Stop!” bellowed Karl. “I’ll not have your ridicule. Come to the point now and have it over with. Kill me if you will, but tell me the story!” He had seen the slender tube in the Zar’s hand.

An expression of surprise, almost of admiration, flickered in the beady eyes of the Zar and was gone. He spoke coldly.

“Very well, I shall explain. You, Peter, are actually my nephew. Your father, Derek Van Dorn, was my brother; he a king of Belravia and I a poor but experienced scientist. He scorned me and he paid, for I learned of the ancient race of the other side of the Moon, the side we can not see from the earth. I went to them and enlisted their aid in warring upon my brother. When we returned to carry on this war I learned that I had a son. So, too, did Derek. But my son was born in obscurity and Derek’s son—you, Peter—in the lap of luxury. The war was short and, to me, sweet. Belravia was first to fall, and I had your father removed from this life by the vibrating death.”

“You monster!” cried Karl. But the slender rod menaced him.

“A moment, my hot-headed nephew. I vowed I’d have your life, Peter, but your father had a few friends and one of these spirited you away. So temporarily you

escaped. But now I have you where I can keep that vow. You, too, shall die. By the vibration. But first—ha! ha!—I'll give you a taste of the purple. Just so the going will be harder."

Karl kept his temper as best he could. He thought, conscience-stricken, of old Rudolph, that good friend of his father. Then he thought of that youth he had taken from the Square.

"Your son?" he asked gently. "Has he the triangular brand?"

The Zar was taken aback. "He has, yes. Why?" he asked.

"I have seen him in the Americas. He now lies wounded and in peril of his life. What do you think of that?"

Karl was triumphant as the Zar paled.

"You lie, Peter Van Dorn!"

But the beady eyes saw that the young man was truthful. Sudden fury assailed the monarch of the East. A bell pealed its mellow summons and three Moon men entered the Presence.

“Quick, Taru—the radiovision! Our ambassador in the Americas!” The Zar was on his feet, his hard features terrible in fear and anger. “By God!” he vowed, “I’ll lay waste the Americas if harm has come to my son. And you”—turning to Karl—“I’ll reserve for you an even more terrible fate than the vibrating death!”

The radiovision was wheeled in and in operation. A frightened face appeared in its disc: the Zar’s ambassador across the sea.

“Moreau—my son!” snapped the Zar. “Where is he?”

“Majesty! Have mercy!” gasped Moreau. “Paul has eluded us. He was skylarking—in the lower levels of New York. But our secret agents are combing the passages. We’ll have him in twenty-four hours. I promise!”

The rage of the Zar was terrible to see. Karl expected momentarily that the white flame would lay him low, for the anger of the mad ruler was directed first at Moreau, then at himself. But a quick, evil calm succeeded the storm.

“You, Peter,” he stated, in tones suddenly silky, “shall have that twenty-four hours—no more. If Moreau has not produced my son in that time you shall be dismembered slowly. A finger; an ear; your tongue; a hand—until you reveal the whereabouts of the heir to my throne!”

“Never! You scum!” Karl was on the dais in a single bound. He had the Zar by the throat, his fingers twisting in the flabby flesh. Might as well have it over at once. “Fratricide—murderer of my father, I’ll take you with me!”

But it was not to be. The throne room was filled with retainers of the mad emperor. Strong hands tore him away and he was borne, struggling and fighting, to the floor. A sharp pain in his forearm. A deadening of the muscles. He was powerless, save for the painful

ability to crawl to his knees, swaying drunkenly. A delicious languor overcame him. Nothing mattered now. He saw that a tall man in the purple had withdrawn the needle of the hypodermic and was replacing the instrument in its case. Ever so slowly, it seemed.

The Zar was laughing. That horrible cackle. But Karl didn't care. They'd have their sport with him. Let 'em! Then it'd be over. Lord! If only he had been a little quicker. He'd have torn the old Zar's windpipe from its place!

"My word," laughed the Zar. "The sacred word of a Van Dorn. I gave it. He'll wear the purple for a day. Take him from my sight!"

Karl was walking, quite willingly now. The effects of the drug were altering. His muscular strength returned but his mental state underwent a complete change. Always he'd wanted a taste of the purple. For years he'd listened to the orators of the Square, to the conflicting statements of old Krassin. But now he'd see. He'd know the joys of the upper levels; the

pleasure cities, perhaps. For one day. But what did it matter? He found himself laughing and joking with his companion, a heavy-set wearer of the purple. They were in a luxurious apartment. Servants! Moon men all of them, but so efficient. They stripped him of his gray denim; discarded it contemptuously. Karl kicked the heap into a corner and laughed delightedly. His bath was waiting.

Much can happen in a day. Clothed in the purple, Karl—Peter Van Dorn, he was, now—expanded. Turgid emotions surged through his new being. He was a new man. In his rightful place. He was delighted with the companionship of his new friend of the purple, Leon Lemaire. An euphonious name! A fine fellow! Fool that the Zar must be, to leave him in the care of so amiable a man. Why, Leon couldn't hold him! None of them could. He'd escape them all—if he wished. Twenty-four hours, indeed!

They were in the midst of a gay company. Wine flowed freely, and Leon had attached to their party a pair of beautiful damsels, young, and easy to know. There was music and dancing. Lights of marvelous color

played over the assemblage in the huge hall, swaying their senses at the will of some expert manipulator. Peter was a different person now. He was exhilarated to the point of intoxication, but not by the wine. Somehow he couldn't bear the taste of the amber fluid the others were imbibing with such gusto. The effects of the drug had left a coppery taste in his mouth. But no matter! Rhoda, his lovely companion at the table leaned close. Her breath was hot at his throat. He swept her into his arms. Leon and the other girl laughed approvingly.

There were many such places in the upper levels of Dorn and they traveled from one to another. Now their party was larger, it having been augmented by the appearance of other of Leon's friends. Fine companions, these men of the purple, and the women were incomparable. Especially Rhoda. They understood one another perfectly now. It was all as he had pictured it.

Someone proposed that they visit the intermediate levels. It would be such a lark to watch the mechanicals. They made the drop in a lift. A laughing,

riotous party. And Peter was one of them! He felt that he had known them for years. Rhoda clung to his arm, and the languorous glances from under her long lashes set the blood racing madly in his veins.

In the levels of the mechanicals they romped boisterously. To them the strange robots—creatures of steel and glass and copper—were objects of ridicule. Poor, senseless mechanisms that performed the tasks that made the wearers of the purple independent of labor. Here they saw the preparation of their synthetic food, untouched by human hands. In one chamber a group of mechanicals, soulless and brainless, engaged in the delicate chemical compounding of raw materials that went into the making of their clothing. Here was a nursery, where tiny tots born to the purple were reared to adolescence by unfeeling but efficient mechanical nurses. The mothers of the purple could not be bothered with their offspring until they had reached the age of reason. The whirring machinery of a huge power plant provided much amusement for the feminine members of the party. It was all so massive;

throbbing with energy. But dirty! Ugh! Lucky the attendants could be mechanicals.

“We have visited the lower levels,” whispered Rhoda in his ear, “but not often. It isn’t pleasant. Ignorant fools in the gray denim—too many of them. I don’t know why we permit their existence. Fools who will not learn. Education made us as we are, and they won’t take it. Sullen looks and evil leers are all that they have for us. Hope nobody suggests going down there now.”

“Me, too,” said Peter. He had forgotten that once he was Karl Krassin, a wearer of the despised gray.

Someone in the party was becoming restless. They must move on.

“Where to?” asked Peter.

“Sans Dolor, sweet boy. A pleasure city within a hundred kilometers of Dorn. You’ll love it, Peter.”

A pleasure city! Fondest dream of the wearers of the gray! In the dim past, when he was Karl, he had dreamed it often. Now he was to visit one!

They were atop the city now and the crystal palace of the Zar shimmered in the sunlight off there across the flat upper surface of Dorn. But it seemed so far away that Peter did not give it a second thought. He was living in the present.

A swift aero took them into the skies and they roared out above the wilderness that was everywhere between the great cities of earth. Funny nobody thought of leaving the cities and exploring the jungles of the outside. But, of course, it wasn't necessary. They had everything they needed within the cities. All of their wants were supplied by the mechanicals and by the few toilers in the gray who still persisted in ignorance and in some perverse ideas that they must work in order to live. Besides, the jungle was dangerous.

Sans Dolor loomed into view, a great island floating in the air a thousand meters above the tossing waters of

the ocean. Peter gave not a thought to the forces that kept it suspended. Dimly he recalled certain words of old Rudolph, words regarding the artificial emanations that had been discovered as capable of counteracting the force of gravity. But his mind was intent on the pleasures to come.

They were over the city. Carefully tended foliage lined its streets and a smooth lagoon glistened in its center. Its towers and spires were decorated with gay colors. The streets were filled with wearers of the purple and the nude bodies of bathers in the lagoon gleamed white in the strong sunlight.

He sensed anew the nearness of Rhoda. Her soft warm hand nestled in his and she responded instantly to his sudden embrace.

There came a shock and the party was stilled in dismay. The aero careened violently and the pilot struggled with controls that were dead. Sans Dolor dropped rapidly away beneath them. They were shooting skyward, drawn by some inexplicable and invisible energy from above.

Rhoda screamed and held him close, trembling violently. All of the women screamed and the men cursed. Leon arose to his feet and stared at Peter. The friendliness was gone from his features and he spat forth an accusation. A glistening mechanism appeared in his hand as if by magic. A ray generator! He had been appointed by the Zar to guard this upstart and, whatever happened, he'd not let him escape with his life. The girl shuddered at sight of the weapon and extricated herself from his arms. Her affection too had been a pose.

Peter's mind was clearing from the effects of the drug. He had not the slightest idea of what might have caused the quick change in the situation but he resolved he would die fighting, if die he must. Leon fumbled with the catch of the generator. It refused to operate. The force that was drawing them upward had paralyzed all mechanisms aboard the little aero. Flinging it from him in disgust he sprang for Peter.

Their minds befuddled, the rest of the men watched dully. The women huddled together in a corner, whimpering. They were a sorry lot after all, thought

Karl. He was no longer Peter Van Dorn, and he thrilled to the joy of battle.

Leon Lemaire was no mean antagonist. His flailing arms were everywhere and a huge fist caught Karl on the side of his head and sent him reeling. But this only served to clear his mind further and to fill him with a cold rage. He bored in unmercifully and Lemaire soon was on the defensive. A blow to his midsection had him puffing and Karl hammered in rights and lefts to the now sinister face that rocked his opponent to his heels. But the minion of the Zar was crafty. He slid to the floor as if groggy, then with catlike agility, dove for Karl's knees, bringing him down with a crash.

The air whistled by them as the ship was drawn upward with ever-increasing speed. The other passengers cowered in fright as the two men rolled over and over on the floor, banging at each other indiscriminately. Both were hurt. Karl's lip was split, and bleeding profusely. One eye was closing. But now he was on top and he pummeled his opponent to a pulp. Long after he ceased resisting them, the blows

continued until the features of Leon Lemaire were unrecognizable. The infuriated Karl did not see that one of the members of the party was creeping up on him from behind. Neither was he aware that the upward motion of the aero had ceased and that they now hung motionless in space. A terrific blow at the base of his skull sent him sprawling. Must have been struck by a rocket, one of those funny ships that crossed the ocean so quickly. A million lights danced before his aching eyeballs.

Lying prone across the inert body of his foe, dimly conscious and fingers clutching weakly, he knew that the cabin was filled with people. Alien voices bellowed commands. There was the screaming of women; the sound of blows; curses ... then all was silence and darkness.

It was a far cry to the little book shop off Cooper Square, but Karl was calling for Rudolph when he next awoke to the realization that he was still in the land of the living. His head was bandaged and his tongue furry. A terrible hangover. Then he heard voices and they were discussing Peter Van Dorn. He

opened one eye as an experiment. The other refused to open. But it might have been worse. At least he was alive; he could see well enough with the one good optic.

“Sh-h!” whispered one of the voices. “He’s recovering!”

He looked solemnly into the eyes of an old man; a pair of wise and gentle eyes that reminded him somehow of Rudolph’s.

“Quiet now, Peter,” said the old man. “You’ll be all right in a few minutes. Banged up a bit, you are, but nothing serious.”

“Don’t call me Peter,” objected Karl. He loathed the sound of the name; loathed himself for his recent thoughts and actions. “I am Karl Krassin,” he continued, “and as such will remain until I die.”

There were others in the room and he saw glances of satisfaction pass between them. This was a strange situation. These men were not of the purple. Neither

were they of the gray. Their garments shone with the whiteness of pure silver. And that's what they were; of finely woven metallic cloth. Was he in another world?

"Very well, Karl." The kind old man was speaking once more. "I merely want you to know that you are among friends—your father's friends."

Surprised into complete wakefulness, Karl struggled to a seated position and surveyed the group that faced him. They were a fine looking lot, mostly older men, but there was a refreshing wholesomeness about them.

"My father?" he faltered. "He's not alive."

"No, my poor boy. Derek Van Dorn left this life at the hands of your uncle, Zar Boris. But we, his friends, are here to avenge him and to restore to you his throne."

"But—but—I still do not understand."

“Of course not, because we’ve kept ourselves hidden from the world for more than twenty-two years, waiting for this very moment. There are forty-one of us, including Rudolph, my brother. We have lived in the jungle since Boris conquered the Eastern Hemisphere. But amongst our numbers were several scientists, two greater than was Boris, even in his heyday. They have done wonderful things and we are now prepared to take back what was taken from Derek—and more. His life we can not restore—Heaven rest him—but his kingdom we can. And to his son it shall be returned.

“You were given into Rudolph’s care when little more than a babe in arms and he has cared for you well. We’ve watched, you know, in the detectoscopes—long range radiovision mechanisms that can penetrate solid walls, the earth itself, to bring to us the images and voices of persons who may be on the other side of the world. We’ve followed your every move, my boy, and the first time we feared for you was yesterday when the drug of the Zar’s physician stole away your sense of right and wrong. But we were in time to save

you, and now we are ready to kneel at your feet and proclaim you our king. First there is the Zar to be dealt with and then we shall set up the new regime. Are you with us?"

Karl gazed at the speaker in wonder. He a king? Always to live amongst the wearers of the purple? To be responsible for the welfare of half the world? It was unthinkable! But Zar Boris, the murderer of his own father—he must be punished, and at the hands of the son!

"I'll do it," he said simply. "That is, I'll do whatever you have planned in the way of exterminating the Zar. Then we'll talk of the new empire. But how is the Zar to be overcome? I thought he was invincible, with his Moon men and terrible weapons."

"Ah! That, my boy, is where our scientists have triumphed. True, his rays were terrible. They could not be combatted when he first returned. The strange chemicals and gases of the Moon men defied analysis or duplication. His citadel atop the city of Dorn is proof against them all; proof against explosives and

rays of all kinds known to him. The disintegration and decomposition rays have no effect on the crystal of its walls. It is hermetically sealed from the outer air so can not be gassed. The vibration impulses have no effect upon its reinforced structure. But there is a ray, a powerful destructive agent, against which it is not proof. And our scientists have developed this agency. You shall have the privilege of pressing the release of the energy that destroys the arch-fiend in his lair. His dominance over, the empire will fall. We shall take it—for you.”

A strange exaltation shone from the faces of those in the room, and Karl found that it was contagious. His bosom swelled and he itched to handle the controls of this wonderful ray.

“This ray,” continued the brother of old Rudolph, “carries the longest vibrations ever measured, the vibrations of infra-red, the heat-ray. We have succeeded in concentrating a terrific amount of power in its production, and with it are able to produce temperatures in excess of that of the interior of the earth, where all substances are molten or gaseous.

The Zar's crystal palace cannot withstand it for a second. He cannot escape!"

"How'll you know he's there at the time?" Karl was greatly excited, but he was curious too.

"Come with me, my boy. I'll show you." The old man led him from the room and the others followed respectfully.

They stopped at a circular port and Karl saw that they were high above the earth in a vessel that hovered motionless, quivering with what seemed like human eagerness to be off.

"This vessel?" he asked.

"It's a huge sphere; the base of our operations. To it we drew the aero on which you were fighting. A magnetic force discovered by our scientists and differing only slightly from that used in counteracting gravity. We let the rest of them go; foolishly I think. But it's done now and we have no fear. From this larger vessel we shall send forth smaller ones, armed

with the heat-ray. The flagship of the fleet is to be yours and you'll lead the attack on Dorn. Here—I'll show you the Zar."

They had reached the room of the detectoscopes—a mass of mechanisms that reminded Karl of nothing so much as the vitals of the intermediate levels which he had visited with Leon—and Rhoda. He knew that he flushed when he thought of her. What a fool he had been!

A disc glowed as one of the silver-robed strangers manipulated the controls. The upper surface of Dorn swung into view. Rapidly the image drew nearer and they were looking at the crystal pyramid that was the Zar's palace. Down, down to its very tip they passed. Karl recoiled from the image as it seemed they were falling to its glistening sides. The sensation passed. They were through, penetrating solid crystal, masonry, steel and duralumin girders. Room after room was opened to their view. It was magic—the magic of the upper levels.

Now they were in the throne room. A group of purple-clad men and women stood before the dais. Leon, Rhoda—all of his wild companions were there, facing the dais. The Zar was raging and the words of his speech came raucously to their ears through the sound-producing mechanism.

“You’ve failed miserably, all of you,” he screamed. “He’s gotten away and you know the penalty. Taru—the vibrating ray!”

The Moon man already was fussing with a gleaming machine, a machine with bristling appendages having metallic spheres on their ends, a machine in which dozens of vacuum tubes glowed suddenly.

Rhoda screamed. It was a familiar sound to Karl. He noted with satisfaction that Leon could hardly stand on his feet and that his face was covered with plasters. Then, startled, he saw that Leon was shivering as with the ague. His outline on the screen grew dim and indistinct as the rate of vibration increased. Then the body bloated and became misty.

He could see through it. The vibrating death! His father had gone the same way!

Karl groaned at the thought. The whine of the distant machine rose in pitch until it passed the limit of audibility. Tiny pin-points of incandescence glowed here and there from the Zar's victims as periods of vibration were reached that coincided with the natural periods of certain of the molecules of their structure. They were no longer recognizable as human beings. Shimmering auras surrounded them. Suddenly they were torches of cold fire, weaving, oscillating with inconceivable rapidity. Then they were gone; vanished utterly.

The Zar laughed—that horrible cackle again.

“Great God!” exclaimed Karl, “let's go! The fiend must not live a moment longer than necessary. Are you ready?”

Rudolph's brother smiled. “We're ready Karl,” he said.

The great vessel hummed with activity. The five torpedo-shaped aeros of the battle fleet were ready to take off from the cavities in the hull. In the flagship Karl was stationed at the control of the heat-ray. His instructions in its operation had been simple. A telescopic sight with crosshairs for the centering of the object to be attacked; a small lever. That was all. He burned with impatience.

Then they were dropping; falling clear of the mother ship. The pilot pressed a button and the electronic motors started. A burst of roaring energy streamed from the tapered stern of their vessel and the earth lurched violently to meet them. Down, down they dived until the rocking surface of Dorn was just beneath them. Then they flattened out and circled the vast upper surface. From the corner of his eye Karl saw that the other four vessels of his fleet were just behind. There was a flurry among the wasplike clouds of pleasure craft over the city. They scurried for cover. Something was amiss!

“Hurry!” shouted Karl. “The warning is out! There is no time to lose!”

He pressed his face to the eye-piece of his sight, his finger on the release lever of the ray. The crystal pyramid crossed his view and was gone. Again it crossed, more slowly this time. And now his sight was dead on it, the gleaming wall rushing toward him. Pressure on the tiny button. They'd crash into the palace in another second! But no, a brilliant flash obscured his vision, a blinding light that made the sun seem dark by comparison. They roared on and upward. He took his eye from the telescope and stared ahead, down. The city was dropping away, and, where the crystal palace had stood, there was a spreading blob of molten material from which searing vapors were drifting. The roofs of the city were sagging all around and great streams of the sparkling, sputtering liquid dripped into the openings that suddenly appeared. Derek Van Dorn was avenged.

"Destroy! Destroy!" yelled Karl madly. A microphone hung before him and his words rang through every vessel of his convoy.

The lust of battle was upon him. A fleet of the Zar's aeros had risen from below; twenty of them at least.

These would be manned by Moon creatures, he knew, and would carry all of the dreadful weapons which had originated on that strange body. But he did not know that his own ships were insulated against most of the rays used by the Zar's forces. He knew only that he must fight; fight and kill; exterminate every last one of the Zar's adherents or be exterminated in the attempt.

Kill! Kill! The madness was contagious. His pilot was a marvel and drove his ship straight for the massed ships of the foe. The air was vivid with light-streamers. A ray from an enemy vessel struck the thick glass of the port through which he looked and the outer surface was shattered and pock-marked. But a cloud of vapor and a dripping stream of fiery liquid told him his own ray had taken effect on a vessel of the enemy. One! They wheeled about and spiraled, coming up under another of the Zar's aeros. It vanished in a puff of steam and they narrowly missed being covered by the falling remnants of incandescent liquid. Two! Karl's aim was good and he

gloated in the fact. Three! They climbed and turned over, dropping again into the fray. Four!

The air grew stifling, for the expended energy of the enemies' rays must needs be absorbed. It could not disintegrate them nor decompose their bodies, but the contacts were many and the liberation of heat enormous. They were suffocating! But Karl would not desist. They drove on, now beneath, now above an enemy ship. He lost count.

One of his own vessels was in trouble. The report came to him from the little speaker at his ear. He looked around in alarm. A glowing object reeled uncertainly over there between two of the aeros of the Zar. The concentration of beams of vibrations was too much for the sturdy craft. It was red hot and its occupants burned alive where they sat. Suddenly it slipped into a spin and went slithering down into the city, leaving a gaping opening where it fell. This sobered him somewhat, but he went into the battle with renewed fury.

How many had they brought down? Fifteen? Sixteen? He tore his purple jacket from his body. The perspiration rolled from his pores. His own ship would be next. But what did it matter? Kill! Kill! He shouted once more into the microphone, then dived into battle. Another and another! In Heaven's name, how many were there? It was maddening. If only he could breathe. His lungs were seared; his eyes smarting from the heat. And then it was over.

Three of the Zar's aeros remained, and these turned tail to run for it. No! They were falling, nose down, under full power; diving into the city from which they had come. Suicide? Yes. They couldn't face the recriminations that must come to them. And anything was better than facing that burning death from the strange little fighters which had come from out the skies. Dorn was a mass of wreckage.

Karl tore at the fastenings of the ports, searing his fingers on the heated metal. His pilot had collapsed, the little aero heading madly skyward with no guiding hand. Air! They must have air! He loosened the pilot's jacket; slapped frantically at his wrists in the effort to

bring him to consciousness. Then he was at the controls of the vessel, tugging on first one, then the other. The aero circled and spun, executing the most dangerous of sideslips and dives. A little voice was speaking to him—the voice of the radio—instructing him. In a daze he followed instructions as best he could. The whirlings of the earth stabilized after a time and he found he was flying the vessel; climbing rapidly.

A sense of power came to him as the little voice of the radio continued to instruct. Here were the controls of the electronic motor; there the gravity-energy. He was proceeding in the wrong direction. But what did it matter? He learned the meaning of the tiny figures of the altimeter; the difference between the points of the compass. Still he drove on.

“East! Turn East!” begged the little voice from the radio. “You’re heading west. Your speed—a thousand kilometers an hour—it’s too fast. Turn back, Zar Peter!”

He tore the loud speaker of the radio from its fastenings. West! He wanted to go west! On and on he sped, becoming more and more familiar with the workings of the little vessel as he progressed. A cooling breeze whistled from the opened ports, a breeze that smelled of the sea. His heart sang with the wonder of it all. He could fly. And fly he did. Zar Peter? Never! He knew now where he belonged; knew what he wanted. He'd find the coast of North America. Follow it until he located New York. A landing would be easy, for had not the voice instructed him in the use of the gravity-energy? He'd make his way to the lower levels, to the little book shop of Rudolph Krassin. A suit of gray denim awaited him there and he'd never discard it.

Onward he sped into the night, which was falling fast. He held to his westward course like a veteran of the air lanes. The pilot had ceased to breathe and Karl was sorry. Game little devil, that pilot. Have to shove his body overboard. Too bad.

Rudolph's brother would understand. He'd be watching in the detectoscope. And the others—those

who had wished to seat him on a throne—they'd understand, too. They'd have to!

Rudolph would forgive him, he knew. Paul Van Dorn—his own cousin—the secret agents of the Zar would never locate him! Too many friends of Rudolph's were of the red police.

He gave himself over to happy thoughts as the little aero sped on in the darkness. Home! He was going home! Back to the gray denim, where he belonged and where now he would remain content.